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IN THE SHADOWS

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

Sixth Edition

THYREA
AND OTHER SONNETS

By JOHN FERGUSON

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IN THE SHADOWS

BY

DAVID GRAY

AUTHOR OF "THE LUGGIE AND OTHER POEMS"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

JOHN FERGUSON

AUTHOR OF "THYREA"

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INTRODUCTION

IT is remarkable how often Poetry and Consumption have gone together. Is there some unsuspected connection, one feels tempted to ask, between the *bacillus tuberculosis* and the *cupido carmina scribendi*? The question is not without interest. Not a few poets "whom the gods love" have died young. But among all those cut off in early life the figure of David Gray, author of *The Luggie and other Poems*, seems to me to stand pathetically alone. *Bacillus tuberculosis* is usually a deceptive guest. But in David Gray, *spes phthisica* was notably absent.

Gray's poems are inseparably connected with his life. The son of a poor handloom weaver, he was born near Kirkintilloch in 1838, and died at the age of twenty-three. By pupil-teaching he supported himself for

four sessions at Glasgow University ; then, bent on a literary life, he turned to London.

He had arranged with his friend, Robert Buchanan, to leave Glasgow at a certain hour ; but, unfortunately missing each other, they travelled by different trains. On arriving in London alone, the author of *The Luggie* wandered aimlessly about for hours. It was a raw, misty afternoon, and never perhaps did a more disconsolate figure pace the pavements of the city of his dreams. Carrying a carpet-bag—filled with MSS.—and with but a few shillings in his pocket, the homeless poet sauntered about in the mist and rain, till at last, footsore and weary, he turned into Hyde Park to spend the night. One cannot tell the thoughts that passed through his mind as he strolled up and down the dismal Park “from weary chime to chime” ; but it is known that he contracted a violent cold which settled on his lungs, and brought about the consumption of which he died.

The two friends did not meet until upwards of a week after their arrival in London. Thereafter they lived together in what Gray calls "the dear, old, ghastly, bankrupt garret." Days and nights were spent in polishing the poems meant to conquer literary London. But the labour was in vain. He knocked at the doors of many influential editors, but failed to gain admission.

In the meantime, his disease had made rapid progress. After a brief residence in the south of England without benefit, Gray returned to Kirkintilloch to die. "I wish to die there," he wrote to his mother from Torquay; and so, in due time—the mere wreck of what he once was—he turned up at his father's house, never to leave it alive again. He lingered for some months, and the thirty sonnets here reprinted were written while he lay waiting for death.

Through the exertions of friends, his MSS. were sent to the printer; and, the day before his death, he had the satisfaction of holding in

his hand a specimen page of *The Luggie* in print. On the following morning he died. He was laid to rest beside the Luggie, "now numbered with the streams illustrious in Scottish song." The year after his death his poems were given to the world. And thus Fame, which had spurned the poet during his lifetime, laid her wreath upon his humble grave.

David Gray's dying sonnets speak for themselves. Technically they may not fulfil all the requirements of the perfect sonnet, but they are so pathetic in their homeliness, so genuine in feeling, and contain such delicate flights of imaginative fancy that they cannot be read without unstinted admiration. They touch the heart, cling to the memory, and are profoundly human. *In the Shadows* is, I think, the most poignantly impressive "swan-song" ever written by poet. Sonnet No. 5 pierces the soul. In anticipation of death the poet describes his broken life, metaphor after metaphor succeeding each other with almost

bewildering rapidity. Apart from its intrinsic merit, Sonnet No. 11 is interesting as the last sad memorial of the poet's friendship with Robert Buchanan. Especially noteworthy are Sonnets Nos. 12, 16, and 21 : No. 12 with its inspiring lesson of "Sorrow and Death" as ministers to raise humanity heavenward ; No. 16, ending on a note of manly fortitude ; and No. 21, presenting an unforgettable picture of the promise of life's day overcast and finally sinking into the gloom of night. In its autumnal tenderness Sonnet No. 19 is very beautiful. It is a sonnet of rare loveliness, providing a mournful commentary on the reflection of the Hebrew prophet that "we all do fade as a leaf."

Gray's reverent love of Nature and of his mother runs as an undercurrent through the whole series. *In the Shadows* reveals a personality charming and spiritual, clinging to earth yet resigning itself to inevitable destiny. It is also unquestionably the work of a true

poetic artist whose sun went down long before noon. And yet, as an able critic has said, "he lived long enough to give evidence of a warm heart and a sensitive nature ; of a keen sympathy with all that is true, tender, and beautiful ; of poetic insight, and considerable power of expression. He was born a poet as surely as the skylark is born to mount and sing." In conception and execution, in simple pathos and real sincerity of feeling, his sonnets appeal alike to head and heart. They strike a note of pity in every compassionate breast, all the deeper when one remembers that the youthful author, in his own words :

"Died, not knowing what it was to live."

In the earlier years of his "poor meagre life," Gray hoped to win an imperishable name. His poems, when they appeared, met with a generous reception. Three editions were issued in 1862, 1874, and 1886—copies of which are now practically unprocurable.

In these circumstances I ventured to suggest to Mr. Melrose the propriety of publishing a new edition ; but, while rejecting the idea, he fixed upon *In the Shadows* to be issued in an unpretentious form as a separate publication. I most earnestly trust that Mr. Melrose's intuition may prove prophetic of a revived interest in David Gray, and that the intensely human note of the sonnets, as well as their unusual beauty, may bring that lasting fame to the poet which he once so confidently anticipated.

JOHN FERGUSON.

February 1920.

IN THE SHADOWS

INDUCTION

ENTER, scared mortal! and in awe
behold

The chancel of a dying poet's mind,
Hung round, ah! not adorned, with pictures
bold

And quaint, but roughly touched for the
refined.

The chancel, not the charnel house! For I
To God have raised a shrine immaculate
Therein, whereon His name to glorify,
And daily mercies meekly celebrate.

So in, scared breather! here no hint of death—
Skull or cross-bones suggesting sceptic fear;
Yea, rather calmer beauty, purer breath
Inhaled from a diviner atmosphere.

I

IF it must be ; if it must be, O God !
That I die young, and make no further
moans ;
That, underneath the unrespective sod,
In unescutcheoned privacy, my bones
Shall crumble soon,—then give me strength
to bear
The last convulsive throe of too sweet
breath !
I tremble from the edge of life, to dare
The dark and fatal leap, having no faith,
No glorious yearning for the Apocalypse ;
But, like a child that in the night-time
cries
For light, I cry ; forgetting the eclipse
Of knowledge and our human destinies.
O peevish and uncertain soul ! obey
The law of life in patience till the Day.

II

“**W**HOM the gods love die young.” The
 thought is old ;
 And yet it soothed the sweet Athenian
 mind.

I take it with all pleasure, overbold,
 Perhaps, yet to its virtue much inclined
 By an inherent love for what is fair.

This is the utter poetry of woe—
 That the bright-flashing gods should cure
 despair
 By love, and make youth precious here
 below.

I die, being young ; and, dying, could become
 A pagan, with the tender Grecian trust.
 Let death, the fell anatomy, benumb

The hand that writes, and fill my mouth
 with dust—
 Chant no funereal theme, but, with a choral
 Hymn, O ye mourners ! hail immortal youth
 auroral !

III

WITH the tear-worthy four, consumption
killed

In youthful prime, before the nebulous
mind

Had its symmetric shapeliness defined,
Had its transcendent destiny fulfilled—

May future ages grant me gracious room,
With Pollok, in the voiceless solitude

Finding his holiest rapture, happiest mood ;
Poor White for ever poring o'er the tomb ;

With Keats, whose lucid fancy mounting
far

Saw heaven as an intenser, a more keen
Redintegration of the Beauty seen

And felt by all the breathers on this
star ;

With gentle Bruce, flinging melodious blame
Upon the Future for an uncompleted name.

IV

O H many a time with Ovid have I borne
 My father's vain, yet well-meant
 reprimand,

To leave the sweet-air'd, clover-purpled
 land

Of rhyme—its Lares loftily forlorn,
 With all their pure humanities unworn—

To batten on the bare Theologies !

To quench a glory lighted at the skies,
 Fed on one essence with the silver morn,
 Were of all blasphemies the most insane.

So deeplier given to the delicious spell

I clung to thee, heart-soothing Poesy !

Now on a sick-bed rack'd with arrowy pain

I lift white hands of gratitude, and cry,
 Spirit of God in Milton ! was it well ?

V

LAST night, on coughing slightly with
sharp pain,

There came arterial blood, and with a
sigh

Of absolute grief I cried in bitter vein,

That drop is my death-warrant: I must
die.

Poor meagre life is mine, meagre and poor!

Rather a piece of childhood thrown away;

An adumbration faint; the overture

To stifled music; year that ends in May;

The sweet beginning of a tale unknown;

A dream unspoken; promise unfulfilled;

A morning with no noon, a rose unblown—

All its deep rich vermilion crushed and
killed

I' th' bud by frost:—Thus in false fear I
cried,

Forgetting that to abolish death Christ died.

VI

SWEETLY, my mother! Go not yet
away—

I have not told my story. Oh, not yet,
With the fair past before me, can I lay
My cheek upon the pillow to forget.

O sweet, fair past, my twenty years of youth
Thus thrown away, not fashioning a man;
But fashioning a memory, forsooth!

More feminine than follower of Pan.
O God! let me not die for years and more!
Fulfil Thyself, and I will live then surely
Longer than a mere childhood. Now heart-
sore,

Weary, with being weary—weary, purely.
In dying, mother, I can find no pleasure
Except in being near thee without measure.

VII

HEW Atlas for my monument ; upraise
 A pyramid for my tomb, that, un-
 destroyed

By rank, oblivion and the hungry void,
 My name shall echo through prospective
 days.

O careless conqueror ! cold, abysmal grave !
 Is it not sad—is it not sad, my heart—
 To smother young ambition, and depart
 Unhonoured and unwilling, like death's
 slave ?

No rare immortal remnant of my thought
 Embalms my life ; no poem, firmly reared
 Against the shock of time, ignobly feared—
 But all my life's progression come to nought.
 Hew Atlas ! build a pyramid in a plain !
 Oh, cool the fever burning in my brain !

VIII

FROM this entangling labyrinthine maze
 Of doctrine, creed and theory ; from
 vague

Vain speculations ; the detested plague
 Of spiritual pride, and vile affrays

Sectarian, good Lord, deliver me !
 Nature ! thy placid monitory glory
 Shines uninterrogated, while the story
 Goes round of this and that theology,
 This creed, and that, till patience close the
 list.

Once more on Carronben's wind-shrilling
 height

To sit in sovereign solitude, and quite

Forget the hollow world—a pantheist
 Beyond Bonaventura ! This were cheer
 Passing the tedious tale of shallow pulpiteer.

IX

A VALE of tears, a wilderness of woe,
 A sad unmeaning mystery of strife ;
 Reason with Passion strives, and Feeling ever
 Battles with Conscience, clear-eyed arbiter.

Thus spake I in sad mood not long ago,
 To my dear father, of this human life,

Its jars and phantasies. Soft answered he,
 With soul of love strong as a mountain river :

We make ourselves—Son, you are what you
 are

Neither by fate nor providence nor cause

External : all unformed humanity

Waiteth the stamp of individual laws ;

And as you love and act, the plastic spirit

Doth the impression evermore inherit.

X

LAST Autumn we were four, and travelled
far

With Phœbe in her golden plenilune,
O'er stubble-fields where sheaves of harvest
boon

Stood slanted. Many a clear and stedfast
star

Twinkled its radiance thro' crisp-leaved
beeches,

Over the farm to which, with snatches rare
Of ancient ballads, songs and saucy speeches,
We hurried, happy mad. Then each had
there

A dove-eyed sister pining for him, four
Fair ladies legacied with loveliness,

Chaste as a group of stars, or lilies blown
In rural nunnery. O God! Thy sore
Strange ways expound. Two to the grave
have gone

Without apparent reason more or less.

XI

NOW, while the long-delaying ash
assumes

The delicate April green, and, loud and
clear,

Through the cool, yellow, mellow twilight
glooms,

The thrush's song enchants the captive
ear ;

Now, while a shower is pleasant in the falling,
Stirring the still perfume that wakes
around ;

Now, that doves mourn, and from the distance
calling,

The cuckoo answers, with a sovereign
sound,—

Come, with thy native heart, O true and
tried !

But leave all books ; for what with con-
verse high,

Flavoured with Attic wit, the time shall glide
On smoothly, as a river floweth by,

Or as on stately pinion, through the grey
Evening, the culver cuts his liquid way.

XII

WHY are all fair things at their death
the fairest ?

Beauty the beautifullest in decay ?

Why doth rich sunset clothe each closing
day

With ever-new apparelling the rarest ?

Why are the sweetest melodies all born
Of pain and sorrow ? Mourneth not the
dove,

In the green forest gloom, an absent love ?

Leaning her breast against that cruel thorn,
Doth not the nightingale, poor bird, com-
plain

And integrate her uncontrollable woe
To such perfection, that to hear is pain ?

Thus, Sorrow and Death—alone realities—
Sweeten their ministration, and bestow
On troublous life a relish of the skies !

XIII

AND, well-belovèd, is this all, this all ?
 Gone, like a vapour which the potent
 morn
 Kills, and in killing glorifies ! I call
 Through the lone night for thee, my dear
 first-born
 Soul-fellow ! but my heart vibrates in vain.
 Ah ! well I know, and often fancy forms
 The weather-blown churchyard where thou
 art lain—
 The churchyard whistling to the frequent
 storms.
 But down the valley, by the river side,
 Huge walnut-trees—bronze-foliaged, motion-
 less
 As leaves of metal—in their shadows hide
 Warm nests, low music, and true tender-
 ness.
 But thou, betrothed ! art far from me, from
 me.
 O heart ! be merciful—I loved him utterly.

XIV

FATHER! when I have passed, with
deathly swoon,

Into the ghost-world, immaterial, dim,
O may nor time nor circumstance dislimn
My image from thy memory, as noon
Steals from the fainting bloom the cooling
dew!

Like flower, itself completing bud and bell,
In lonely thicket, be thy sorrow true,

And in expression secret. Worse than hell
To see the grave hypocrisy—to hear

The crocodilian sighs of summer friends
Outraging grief's assuasive, holy ends!

But thou art faithful, father, and sincere;
And in thy brain the love of me shall dwell
Like the memorial music in the curved
sea-shell.

XV

FROM my sick-bed gazing upon the
west,

Where all the bright effulgences of day
Lay steeped in sunless vapours, raw and
grey,—

Herein (methought) is mournfully exprest

The end of false ambitions, sullen doom
Of my brave hopes, Promethean desires :
Barren and perfumeless, my name expires

Like summer-day setting in joyless gloom.

Yet faint I not in sceptical dismay,

Upheld by the belief that all pure thought
Is deathless, perfect : that the truths out-
wrought

By the laborious mind cannot decay,

Being evolutions of that Sovereign Mind

Akin to man's ; yet orb'd, exhaustless,
undefined.

XVI

THE daisy-flower is to the summer sweet,
 Though utterly unknown it live and
 die ;

The spheral harmony were incomplete
 Did the dew'd laverock mount no more
 the sky,

Because her music's linkèd sorcery
 Bewitched no mortal heart to heavenly mood.

This is the law of nature, that the deed
 Should dedicate its excellence to God,
 And in so doing find sufficient meed.

Then why should I make these heart-burning
 cries,

In sickly rhyme with morbid feeling rife,
 For fame and temporal felicities ?
 Forgetting that in holy labour lies
 The scholarship severe of human life.

XVII

O GOD, it is a terrible thing to die
Into the inextinguishable life ;
To leave this known world with a feeble cry,
All its poor jarring and ignoble strife.
O that some shadowy spectre would disclose
The Future, and the soul's confineless
hunger
Satisfy with some knowledge of repose !
For here the lust of avarice waxeth stronger,
Making life hateful ; youth alone is true,
Full of a glorious self-forgetfulness :
Better to die inhabiting the new
Kingdom of faith and promise, and confess,
Even in the agony and last eclipse,
Some revelation of the Apocalypse !

XVIII

WISE in his day that heathen emperor,
 To whom, each morrow, came a
 slave, and cried—

“Philip, remember thou must die ;” no
 more.

To me such daily voice were misapplied—
 Disease guests with me ; and each cough, or
 cramp,

Or aching, like the Macedonian slave,
 Is my *memento mori*. 'Tis the stamp
 Of God's true life to be in dying brave.

“I fear not death, but dying”¹—not the
 long

Hereafter, sweetened by immortal love ;
 But the quick, terrible last breath—the
 strong

Convulsion. Oh, my Lord of breath above !
 Grant me a quiet end, in easeful rest—
 A sweet removal, on my mother's breast.

¹ This is a saying of Socrates.

XIX

OCTOBER'S gold is dim—the forests
rot,

The weary rain falls ceaseless, while the day
Is wrapp'd in damp. In mire of village
way

The hedgerow leaves are stamp'd, and, all
forgot,

The broodless nest sits visible in the thorn.

Autumn, among her drooping marigolds,
Weeps all her garnered sheaves and empty
folds

And dripping orchards—plundered and for-
lorn.

The season is a dead one, and I die !

No more, no more for me the spring shall
make

A resurrection in the earth and take

The death from out her heart—O God, I
die !

The cold throat-mist creeps nearer, till I
breathe

Corruption. Drop, stark night, upon my
death !

XX

DIE down, O dismal day! and let me
live.

And come, blue deeps! magnificently
strewn

With coloured clouds—large, light and
fugitive—

By upper winds through pompous motions
blown.

Now it is death in life—a vapour dense

Creeps round my window till I cannot see
The far snow-shining mountains, and the
glens

Shagging the mountain-tops. O God!
make free

This barren, shackled earth, so deadly cold—

Breathe gently forth Thy spring, till winter
flies

In rude amazement, fearful and yet bold,

While she performs her custom'd charities.

I weigh the loaded hours till life is bare—

O God! for one clear day, a snowdrop, and
sweet air!

XXI

SOMETIMES, when sunshine and blue
sky prevail—

When spent winds sleep, and, from the
budding larch,
Small birds, with incomplete, vague sweet-
ness, hail

The unconfirmed, yet quickening life of
March,—

Then say I to myself, half-eased of care,
Toying with hope as with a maiden's token—
“This glorious, invisible fresh air
Will clear my blood till the disease be
broken.”

But slowly, from the wild and infinite west,
Up-sails a cloud, full-charged with bitter
sleet.

The omen gives my spirit deep unrest ;
I fling aside the hope, as indiscreet—
A false enchantment, treacherous and fair—
And sink into my habit of despair.

XXII

O WINTER! wilt thou never, never
go?

O Summer! but I weary for thy coming;
Longing once more to hear the Luggie flow,
And frugal bees laboriously humming.
Now, the east wind diseases the infirm,
And I must crouch in corners from rough
weather.

Sometimes a winter sunset is a charm—
When the fired clouds, compacted, blaze
together,

And the large sun dips, red, behind the hills.
I, from my window, can behold this
pleasure;

And the eternal moon, what time she fills
Her orb with argent, treading a soft measure,
With queenly motion of a bridal mood,
Through the white spaces of infinitude.

XXIII

O H, beautiful moon ! Oh, beautiful moon !
again

Thou persecutest me until I bend
My brow, and soothe the aching of my brain.

I cannot see what handmaidens attend
Thy silver passage as the heaven clears ;

For, like a slender mist, a sweet vexation
Works in my heart, till the impulsive tears
Confess the bitter pain of adoration.

Oh, too, too beautiful moon ! lift the white
shell

Of thy soft splendour through the shining
air !

I own the magic power, the witching spell,

And, blinded by thy beauty, call thee fair !

Alas ! not often now thy silver horn

Shall me delight with dreams and mystic
love forlorn !

XXIV

'TIS April, yet the wind retains its tooth.
I cannot venture in the biting air,
But sit and feign wild trash, and dreams
uncouth,

“ Stretched on the rack of a too easy chair.”
And when the day has howled itself to sleep,
The lamp is lighted in my little room ;
And lowly, as the tender lapwings creep,
Comes my own mother, with her love's
perfume.

O living sons with living mothers ! learn
Their worth, and use them gently, with
no chiding,

For youth, I know, is quick ; of temper
stern

Sometimes ; and apt to blunder without
guiding.

So was I long, but now I see her move,
Transfigured in the radiant mist of love.

XXV

LYING awake at holy eventide,
 While in clear mournfulness the
 throstle's hymn
 Hushes the night, and the great west,
 grown dim,
 Laments the sunset's evanescent pride :
 Lo ! I behold an orb of silver brightly
 Grow from the fringe of sunset, like a
 dream
 From Thought's severe infinitude, and nightly
 Show forth God's glory in its sacred gleam.
 Ah, Hesper ! maidenliest star that ere
 Twinkled in firmament ! cool gloaming's
 prime
 Cheerer, whose fairness maketh wondrous
 fair
 Old pastorals, and the Spenserian rhyme :—
 Thy soft seduction doth my soul enthrall
 Like music, with a dying, dying fall !

XXVI

THERE are three bonnie Scottish melodies,
 So native to the music of my soul,
 That of its humours they seem prophecies.

The ravishment of Chaucer was less whole,
 Less perfect, when the April nightingale
 Let itself in upon him. Surely, Lord !
 Before whom psaltery and clarichord,
 Concentral with saintly song, prevail,

There lurks some subtle sorcery, to Thee
 And heaven akin, in each woe-burning air !

Land of the Leal, and *Bonnie Bessie Lee*,
 And *Home, Sweet Home*, the lilt of love's
 despair.

Now, in remembrance even, the feelings
 speak,

For lo ! a shower of grace is on my cheek.

XXVII

“Thou art wearin’ awa’, Jean,
 Like snaw when it’s thaw, Jean;
 Thou art wearin’ awa’
 To the land o’ the leal.”

O THE impassable sorrow, mother mine!
 Of the sweet, mournful air which,
 clear and well,
 For me thou singest! Never the divine
 Mahomedan harper, famous Israfel,
 Such rich enchanting luxury of woe
 Elicited from all his golden strings!
 Therefore, dear singer sad! chant clear and
 low
 And lovingly the bard’s imaginings.
 O poet unknown! conning thy verses o’er
 In lone, dim places, sorrowfully sweet;
 And O musician! touching the quick core
 Of pity, when thy skilful closes meet—
 My tears confess your witchery as they flow,
 Since I, too, *wear* away like the unenduring
 snow.

XXVIII

UPLIFT in unparticipated night
 Oh indefinable Being ! far retired
 From mortal ken in uncreated light :
 While demonstrating glories unacquired
 When shall the wavering sciences evolve
 The infinite secret, Thee ? What mind
 shall scan
 The tenour of Thy workmanship, or solve
 The dark, perplexing destiny of man ?
 Oh ! in the hereafter border-land of wonder,
 Shall the proud world's inveterate tale be
 told,
 The curtain of all mysteries torn asunder,
 The cerements from the living soul un-
 rolled ?
 Impatient questioner, soon, soon shall death
 Reveal to thee these dim phantasmata of
 faith.

XXIX

AND thus proceeds the mode of human
life

From mystery to mystery again ;
From God to God, thro' grandeur, grief and
strife,

A hurried plunge into the dark inane
Whence we had lately sprung. And is't for
ever ?

Ah ! sense is blind beyond the gaping clay,
And all the eyes of faith can see it never.

We know the bright-haired sun will bring
the day,

Like glorious book of silent prophecy ;

Majestic night assume her starry throne ;
The wondrous seasons come and go : but we
Die, unto mortal ken for ever gone.

Who shall pry further ? who shall kindle
light

In the dread bosom of the infinite ?

XXX

O THOU of purer eyes than to behold
 Uncleaness ! sift my soul, removing
 all

Strange thoughts, imaginings fantastical,
 Iniquitous allurements manifold.

Make it into a spiritual ark ; abode

Severely sacred, perfumed, sanctified,

Wherein the Prince of Purities may abide—
 The holy and eternal Spirit of God.

The gross, adhesive loathsomeness of sin,
 Give me to see. Yet, O far more, far more,
 That beautiful purity which the saints adore

In a consummate Paradise within
 The Veil,—O Lord, upon my soul bestow,
 An earnest of that purity here below.

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UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

Seventh Edition

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AND OTHER SONNETS

By JOHN FERGUSON

Price, Paper, 1s. net ; Cloth, 1s. 6d. net

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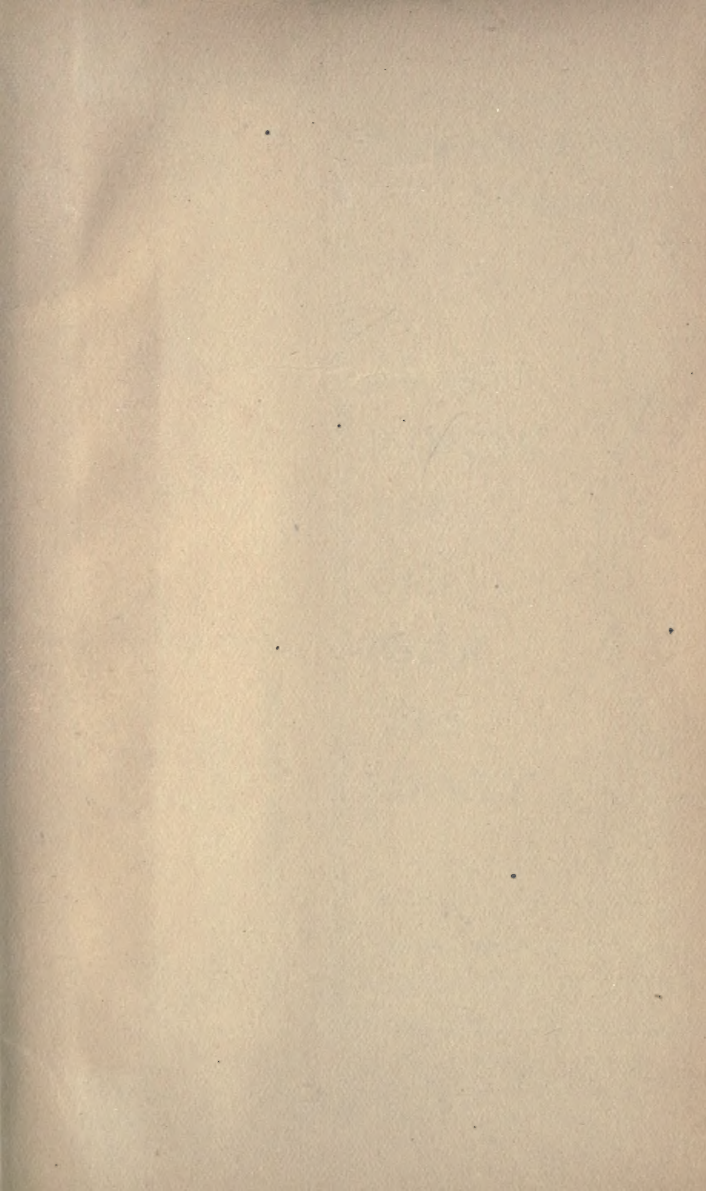
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